

P 130855Z OCT 99  
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1081  
INFO ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE  
AMEMBASSY NICOSIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIRUT 004484

PARIS FOR LEAF  
LONDON FOR SUTPHIN  
NICOSIA FOR ILMG

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/12/09  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [ECON](#) [EAID](#) [SY](#) [IS](#) [LE](#)  
SUBJECT: JEZZINE: LOOKING FOR NORMALITY

CLASSIFIED BY AMB. DAVID SATTERFIELD. REASON: 1.5 (B, D)

11. (C) SUMMARY: EMBASSY STAFF VISITED THE SOUTHERN CITY OF JEZZINE RECENTLY, FOUR MONTHS AFTER THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE SOUTH LEBANON ARMY (SLA). INITIAL FEAR AMONG RESIDENTS ABOUT SAFETY HAVE ABATED. ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ACTIVITY IS INCREASING MODESTLY, BUT HAS NOT REPLACED THE ECONOMIC LOSS FROM THE SLA'S PULLOUT, WHICH ENDED MILITIA SPENDING ON LOCAL GOODS AS WELL AS PAYMENTS TO LOCAL FIGHTERS AND WIDOWS, AND SEVERED TRADE LINKS TO THE SECURITY ZONE. GOL RECONSTRUCTION AND ASSISTANCE ARE VIRTUALLY NON-EXISTENT, AND SO IS THE PRESENCE OF THE STATE. FOLLOWING INITIAL VISITS BY TOP GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, THE REGION HAS SEEN LITTLE FOLLOW-UP WORK BY SERVICE MINISTRIES AND HAS SUFFERED A VIRTUAL BLOCKADE BY ARMY CHECKPOINTS SET UP OUTSIDE THE CITY (WHERE THE ARMY IS ABSENT), MAKING MOVEMENT FOR MOST PEOPLE IMPRACTICAL. CRITICS SEE A DELIBERATE SYRIAN/LEBANESE EFFORT TO TREAT JEZZINE AS ABNORMAL, IN ORDER TO DISCOURAGE FURTHER POLITICALLY EMBARRASSING UNILATERAL WITHDRAWALS BY ISRAEL. WHATEVER THE MOTIVE, THE PEOPLE OF JEZZINE FEEL ISOLATED. THE CONVICTION OF NEARLY 200 SLA MEMBERS FROM JEZZINE ACCENTUATES THIS MOOD, ALTHOUGH THE JUDICIAL PROCESS HAS BEEN TRANSPARENT AND AVERAGE ONE YEAR SENTENCES MODEST.

12. (C) JEZZINE'S FUTURE MAY LIE IN TOURISM, ITS TRADITIONAL REVENUE SOURCE. UNTIL THE CHECKPOINTS ARE LIFTED, JEZZINE WILL REMAIN CUT OFF FROM ITS OLD MARKETS, REVENUE SOURCES AND ECONOMIC NETWORK IN THE ISRAELI-OCCUPIED SECURITY ZONE BUT NOT YET CONNECTED TO LEBANON'S NATIONAL ECONOMY AND CERTAINLY UNABLE TO DRAW TOURISTS. AGRICULTURAL REVENUE ALONE WILL NOT REVITALIZE THE REGION OR KEEP ITS YOUNG PEOPLE FROM MOVING AWAY. ONE BRIGHT SPOT IS THE \$500,000 USAID PROGRAM FOR THE REGION. U.S. PROJECTS HAVE BOOSTED THE MORALE OF VILLAGE RESIDENTS, RESULTING IN CROSS-CONFESSIONAL COOPERATION AMONG THEM INSTEAD OF FIGHTING OVER PROJECT FUNDING FOR THEIR OWN INTERESTS. END SUMMARY.

LUNCH WITH NOTABLES: THE PARTY LINE

13. (C) THE PARTY LINE BY OFFICIALDOM IN JEZZINE IS DEFINITELY TO ACCENTUATE THE POSITIVE. WE HEARD AN UPBEAT ASSESSMENT OVER LUNCH HOSTED BY JEZZINE MARONITE MP SAMIR AZAR (A CLOSE ALLY OF AMAL MOVEMENT) AND LOCAL NOTABLES, INCLUDING THE POLICE COMMANDER. AZAR AND HIS GUESTS EXPRESSED CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM ABOUT THE FUTURE OF JEZZINE FREE OF THE SLA PRESENCE. THE SECURITY SITUATION WAS JUDGED GOOD, DESPITE THE ABSENCE OF THE ARMY, BECAUSE IT HINGED ON A POLITICAL CONSENSUS BY ALL PARTIES THAT JEZZINE SHOULD NOT BE DESTABILIZED. GUESTS ECHOED DISAPPOINTMENT AT THE LACK OF EU ACTION IN LOCAL DEVELOPMENT AND RECONSTRUCTION BUT PRAISED USAID FOR DELIVERING PRACTICAL PROGRAMS SPEEDILY. AZAR AND HIS COLLEAGUES EXPRESSED PLEASURE WITH THE GOL'S RECONSTRUCTION EFFORTS IN JEZZINE. SO FAR, RENOVATION HAS BEGUN ON THE HOSPITAL AND MAIN

GOVERNMENT BUILDING (SERAIL), AND FUNDS WERE RELEASED RECENTLY FOR ROAD ASPHALT.

AND THE REAL MOOD

¶4. (C) BUT IN A PRIVATE WALK IN THE GARDEN, AZAR ADMITTED THE NEED FOR MORE GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT. THE AMAL-CONTROLLED, BUT STATE-FUNDED COUNCIL FOR THE SOUTH HAD DISPERSED ONLY LIMITED FUNDS FOR HOUSE RECONSTRUCTION IN THE JEZZINE POCKET -- BUT WAS SO STINGY TOWARD CHRISTIAN JEZZINE THAT THE PERCEPTION OF THE COUNCIL AS A SHI'A SLUSH FUND WAS ONLY REINFORCED. PRESIDENT LAHOUD, PRIME MINISTER HOSS, AND MOST CABINET MINISTERS VISITED JEZZINE AFTER THE PULLOUT, TO JOIN IN THE FESTIVE ATMOSPHERE; BUT NOT ONE REPRESENTATIVE OF A SERVICE MINISTRY HAS RETURNED, AZAR COMPLAINED. BUREAUCRATIC DELAYS BLOCKED PRIVATE SECTOR INVESTMENT AS WELL; FOR EXAMPLE, ONE NATIONAL BANK PLANNED TO OPEN A BRANCH IN JEZZINE, BUT HAS FAILED TO OBTAIN A PERMIT FROM THE GOVERNMENT -- OSTENSIBLY BECAUSE THE GOVERNMENT WANTS TO HOLD ACTIVITY UNTIL A MASTER PLAN IS IN PLACE. AZAR AND OTHERS SUPPORT A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH -- AND HAVE CONTRIBUTED IDEAS -- BUT WISH MORE HAD BEEN DONE TO ENCOURAGE THE CITIZENRY IN THE MEANTIME.

¶5. (C) THE LOCAL ISF COMMANDER TOLD US THAT HIS JOB IS DIFFICULT FOR A NUMBER OF REASONS. FIRST, HE IS WOEFULLY UNDERSTAFFED AND HAS FEW RESOURCES. HE HAS ONLY ONE CAR AT HIS DISPOSAL FOR A RUGGED, RURAL AREA AND 33 MEN UNDER HIS COMMAND. THE AVERAGE AGE OF THE MEN IS 55 TO 60. THE ISF USES FIVE-MAN PATROLS IN JEZZINE AND FIVE MEN IN NEARBY SUPPORT ARRAY. THE COMMANDER NOTED THAT HIS APPOINTMENT TO THE JEZZINE AREA IS ACTUALLY A VIOLATION OF THE LAW BECAUSE HE IS AN AREA NATIVE. THIS POINT LEADS TO OTHER DIFFICULTIES AS HE SEEKS TO MAINTAIN LAW AND ORDER IN A REGION THAT FELL INTO BENIGN NEGLECT OF THE LAW DURING THE OCCUPATION. HE IS FORCED TO INTERVENE IN PETTY DISPUTES INVOLVING PEOPLE WITH WHOM HE GREW UP, CAUSING SOME BAD FEELINGS TOWARDS HIM. HE ADDED THAT THE AREA IS FULL OF GOL INTELLIGENCE SERVICE OPERATIVES.

¶6. (C) LIKE AZAR, HE STRESSED THAT JEZZINE'S EVIDENT SECURITY RESULTED NOT FROM HIS OWN MODEST PRESENCE, BUT FROM A "POLITICAL DECISION" BY SYRIA, HIZBALLAH, AMAL, THE ISRAELIS, AND THE SLA. HE NOTED THAT HIS CURRENT FORCES COULD NOT POSSIBLY COPE WITH DEMANDS TO MAINTAIN ORDER DURING NEXT YEAR'S PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS, SHOULD A DECISION BE TAKEN TO SET UP BALLOT BOXES IN JEZZINE FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE 1972.

¶7. (C) DESPITE ISF INADEQUACIES, USAID CONTRACTORS SAID MOST RESIDENTS HAVE OVERCOME INITIAL FEARS ABOUT SECURITY. AT FIRST, MANY PEOPLE WERE RELUCTANT TO RETURN TO JEZZINE, FEARING THEIR SAFETY. THOSE FEARS SUBSIDED AFTER A COUPLE OF MONTHS -- THERE HAVE BEEN NO KNOWN INFILTRATIONS OF POPULATED AREAS BY HIZBALLAH, CONTRACTORS NOTED.

THE OPPOSITION: NOT SO ROSY PICTURE

¶8. (C) WE MET WITH FORMER AMBASSADOR TO THE U.S. SIMON KARAM AT HIS FAMILY HOUSE IN JEZZINE. KARAM SAID THAT JEZZINE NEEDS NORMALITY. AT PRESENT IT IS ISOLATED FROM OTHER TOWNS. ENTRY AND EXIT IS CONTROLLED BY GOL CHECKPOINTS. ONLY RESIDENTS OF JEZZINE ARE PERMITTED TO ENTER. AS A RESULT, JEZZINE IS NOT RE-INTEGRATED INTO THE NATION, YET ITS OLD TRADING AND REVENUE LINKS TO ISRAELI OCCUPIED SOUTH LEBANON ARE CUT. (NB: CUSTOMS SQUADS NOW PREVENT GOODS FROM ENTERING FROM MARJAYOUN, ENDING ONE FAMOUS JEZZINE SOURCE OF INCOME -- SMUGGLING -- AND BRINGING BEIRUT'S SUPPLY OF VITAL ISRAELI-SOURCED GOODS, SUCH AS CHIVAS REGAL

WHISKY, TO DANGEROUSLY LOW LEVELS.)

¶9. (C) KARAM EXPRESSED CONCERN ABOUT THE FAMILIES AND WIDOWS OF SLA MILITIAMEN. MANY OF THEM ARE DESTITUTE BECAUSE THE BREADWINNERS ARE EITHER IN LEBANESE JAILS OR DEAD, AND SLA PAYMENTS CEASED WITH THE EVACUATION. KARAM SAID THAT HE IS WORKING TO ESTABLISH AN NGO TO SECURE FINANCIAL RELIEF FOR THESE FAMILIES. HE IS WORKING TO SECURE A PARDON FOR THE APPROXIMATELY 200 FORMER SLA MEMBERS WHO TURNED THEMSELVES OVER TO THE GOL. AS PROMISED PRIVATELY BY THE PRESIDENT AND HIS BROTHER, LEBANON'S MILITARY PROSECUTOR, THE JUDICIAL PROCESS HAS BEEN TRANSPARENT AND MOST SENTENCES LIGHT -- ONE YEAR ON AVERAGE. (COMMENT: THIS IS ONE UNSUNG LEBANESE CONFIDENCE BUILDING MEASURE, INDICATIVE OF HOW THE BULK OF THE SLA RANK-AND-FILE MAY BE TREATED IN THE EVENT OF AN ISRAELI PULLOUT FROM THE SOUTH. END COMMENT.) ACCORDING TO KARAM'S FIGURES, 182 OF THE SLA'ERS WHO SURRENDERED AT JEZZINE ARE SERVING SENTENCES; 10 WERE FREED; AND 20 AWAIT JUDICIAL REVIEW.

¶10. (C) JEZZINE'S GREEK CATHOLIC MP, NADIM SALEM, SPOKE BITTERLY TO US ABOUT THE GOVERNMENT'S HANDLING OF JEZZINE (WE CALLED ON HIM IN BEIRUT, AS HE HAS NO HOME IN JEZZINE AND DOESN'T GET ALONG WITH ANY OF OUR OTHER HOSTS). SALEM IS ENGAGED IN A SPECTACULAR -- PERHAPS SUICIDAL -- FIGHT WITH SPEAKER/AMAL MOVEMENT HEAD NABIH BERRI, SO IS HAMMERING HARD ON POPULIST ANTI-GOVERNMENT LINES IN PREPARATION FOR NEXT YEAR'S ELECTIONS. HE CONDEMNED THE TRIALS OF SLA'ERS AS UNFAIR COMPARED TO THE OPEN-HANDED TREATMENT OF HIZBALLAH TODAY, OR LEBANON'S OTHER MILITIAS WHEN THEY VOLUNTARILY DISBANDED IN 1991. HE DISMISSED THE LACK OF A STATE PRESENCE IN JEZZINE -- WHETHER THE ARMY OR THE SERVICE MINISTRIES -- AS IN A STATE OF SUSPENSE. THE MOTIVE: TO DISCOURAGE FURTHER ISRAELI WITHDRAWALS AND TO KEEP ALL OPTIONS OPEN, IN CASE DAMASCUS WANTS TO TURN THE HEAT UP ON THE IDF/SLA IN ADJOINING AREAS.

¶11. (C) COMMENT: HIS ARGUMENT MAY NOT BEAR SCRUTINY, BUT THE POINT IS THAT SOME RESIDENTS OF JEZZINE STILL FEEL EXPOSED AND VULNERABLE. THEY ARE PREY TO POLITICIANS LIKE SALEM WHO WILL PLAY ON THAT MOOD -- AGGRAVATED BY CHRISTIAN JEZZINE'S SENSE OF CONFESSIONAL ISOLATION WITHIN A MUSLIM OCEAN IN THE SOUTH -- IF IT SERVES THEIR PURPOSES. WE EVEN ENCOUNTERED SOME IN JEZZINE WHO WERE CONVINCED THE AREA WAS BEING KEPT APART BY INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENT, SO IT COULD BE EMPTIED OF ITS NATIVES TO MAKE WAY FOR PALESTINIAN RESETTLEMENT. THE EXISTENCE OF MYSTERIOUS, NEVER OCCUPIED APARTMENT BUILDINGS ON THE MARCHES OF JEZZINE WERE CITED AS SOLE EVIDENCE OF THIS PLOT. END COMMENT.

TOURISM IN JEZZINE: BACK TO THE FUTURE?

¶12. (C) MANY OF OUR CONTACTS BELIEVED THE REGION'S FUTURE LIES IN ITS TRADITIONAL MONEYMAKER: TOURISM. KARAM EXPLAINED THAT FOLLOWING THE INTRODUCTION OF THE AUTOMOBILE TO THE MIDEAST IN THE 1930'S, RICH PALESTINIANS AND EGYPTIANS MOTORED IN THE SUMMER TO THE NEAREST NICE MOUNTAIN TOWN THEY COULD FIND, JEZZINE -- GIVING BIRTH TO A TOURIST INDUSTRY. THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT CUT JEZZINE OFF FROM THIS FLOW, AND LEBANON'S CIVIL WAR AND ISRAELI OCCUPATION "PUT THE NAIL IN THE COFFIN." A MODEST TOURIST INFRASTRUCTURE REMAINS, AND HOTELIERS AND RESTAURANTEURS GOT A BOOST FROM JEZZINE'S WEEK-LONG SHOPPING FESTIVAL HELD IN AUGUST UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE MINISTRY OF ECONOMY AND TRADE. THE EVENT, HOWEVER, WAS LESS THAN SUCCESSFUL, SINCE NON-RESIDENTS COULD NOT CROSS ARMY HURDLES AT THE CHECKPOINTS. JEZZINE MAY NEVER AGAIN ATTRACT MIDDLE EAST TOURISTS (ALTHOUGH KARAM, A NORMALIZATION TRUE BELIEVER, DREAMS OF ISRAELIS DRIVING FROM TEL AVIV

TO ENJOY THE MOUNTAIN AIR IN A LIBERAL, CHRISTIAN ENVIRONMENT). HOWEVER, THERE MAY BE A POSSIBILITY THAT THIS UNSPOILED REGION COULD BECOME A POPULAR SUMMER RETREAT FOR LEBANESE TOURISTS, ONCE THE GOL LIFTS THE CHECKPOINTS AND PERMITS OTHER THAN RESIDENTS TO VISIT JEZZINE -- AND IF, CONTRARY TO FORM, THE LEBANESE IMPOSE ZONING TO PRESERVE NATURAL BEAUTY.

#### THE USAID EXPERIENCE

¶13. (U) THE CURRENT MAIN SOURCE OF INCOME IN JEZZINE IS AGRICULTURE. THE AREA PRODUCES SOME 150,000 CRATES OF APPLES PER YEAR. ABOUT TWO TONS OF VALUABLE PINE NUTS -- A LOCAL DELICACY -- ARE HARVESTED ANNUALLY. GRAPES ARE SOLD FOR USE IN THE PRODUCTION OF ARAK, THE NATIONAL BEVERAGE. REVENUES FROM AGRICULTURAL SALES BY LAW REMAIN WITH THE MUNICIPALITY FOR LOCAL EXPENDITURE.

¶14. (U) IT IS IN THIS FIELD THAT USAID HAS CONCENTRATED. WE STOPPED IN THE SUNNI VILLAGE OF BENOAITI, WHERE USAID FINANCED TWO IRRIGATION PROJECTS, CONSTRUCTION OF A RETAINING WALL, A ROAD, AND A BRIDGE. THE PROJECT IS OVERSEEN BY MERCY CORPS INTERNATIONAL (MCI). MCI'S OFFICER IN CHARGE, HIAM SHEDID, SAID THAT FOLLOWING THE WITHDRAWAL, THERE WAS NO COOPERATION AMONG THE VARIOUS VILLAGES, AS EACH FOUGHT FOR A PIECE OF THE USAID PIE. THIS SQUABBLING HAS SUBSIDED, AS RESIDENTS REALIZED THAT THEY CAN BENEFIT ONLY AS A WHOLE INSTEAD OF AS FACTIONS. BENOATI'S MAYOR PROUDLY SHOWED OFF THE PROJECTS IN HIS VILLAGE, AND ACKNOWLEDGED THAT RESIDENTS AT FIRST WERE SKEPTICAL THAT THE USAID PROJECTS WOULD EVER COME TO FRUITION. THEY ARE NOW SO ENTHUSIASTIC THAT NEIGHBORING VILLAGERS HAVE DELUGED MERCY CORPS WITH PROPOSED PROJECTS, AND ALREADY HAVE RAISED THE REQUIRED LOCAL MATCHING FUNDS. EU REPRESENTATIVES FROM FRANCE, GERMANY, AND ITALY VISITED THE REGION AND HAVE CARRIED OUT STUDIES, BUT NONE HAVE PROGRESSED BEYOND THE REPORT STAGE, IN CONTRAST TO WELL-KNOWN U.S. PROJECTS -- A POINT GLEEFULLY MADE BY VIRTUALLY EVERYONE WE MET.

SATTERFIELD